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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Administrator Training Program (ATP), a joint venture between San Jose Unified School District and Stanford University. A discussion of the ATP's theoretical framework is followed by an outline of the structure and content of the program and a review of the ATP outcomes. Then the generic elements of the ATP model are identified with a view to their application in assisting administrators in other school districts to be better leaders. The conclusion states ATP's purpose, which is to combine theoretical underpinnings with coursework about behavioral structures and group interaction processes in order to present future educational leaders with cognitive tools to use in solving specific district and school-based problems. (JAM)

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THE ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING PROGRAM

A Model of Educational Leadership

September 1988

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ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING PROGRAM
San Jose (CA) Unified School District - Stanford University
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Introduction

> Educational administration is a bus schedule with footnotes by Kierkegaard. It involves the rudimentary pragmatics of making organizations work -- laws, rules, logistics, therapy; complicated questions of inference, the interpretation of information, and the invention and justification of action; subtle literary and philosophic issues of human meaning...(School Review, 86, 1978, p. 244)

The complexity of the life of a school administrator is captured in the above quote by J.G. March, and leads to one of the most pressing questions in education today: What is an educational leader? To elaborate, how does an educational leader balance the administrative demands of the job with the intellectual rigor necessary to communicate the academic focus of schooling?

Research on effective schools tells us that schools that succeed do so because the administrators within those schools provide purposeful educational leadership. But what is educational leadership and how do we train educational leaders?

In this paper, we will describe an innovative process that not only defines educational leadership but also guides school administrators toward being educational leaders. This process, the ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING PROGRAM (ATP), is a joint venture between San Jose Unified School District and Stanford University, funded by the Hewlett Foundation.

The description of this innovative program begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework of the ATP and moves on to outline the structure and content of the program. Next, the outcomes of the Administrator Training Program are reviewed. Finally, we discuss what we have learned about training administrators to be educational leaders and how to apply this knowledge in other school districts.

Background of ATP

Over the past ten years, the San Jose Unified School District has undergone a particularly arduous period. In the 1970s, the district lived through the trying realities of Proposition 13, budget cuts, and the resulting employee lay-offs. The 1980s brought an eleven-day teacher's strike, followed by the district's declaration of bankruptcy. In 1985, the district lost

a desegregation suit, and a sweeping re-organization of the schools followed.

Ramon Cortines was hired as the new superintendent in 1984 and the bankruptcy problems were resolved. Along with the financial solutions, Cortines brought a vision for schooling that focused on the administrator as a leader of instructional programs. Due to the various financial problems, until this time there had been no district support for administrator training.

In exploring the articulation of his vision, Superintendent Cortines met with Professor Robert Calfee of Stanford University. Together, they approached the Hewlett Foundation for support to develop an administrator training program built around the principal's impact on the instructional program and an emphasis on an academic focus for schools.

In July, 1985, the Hewlett foundation awarded a $25,000 grant to the district to plan a permanent, comprehensive, self-sustaining administrator training program. A planning committee made up of San Jose administrators and consultants from Stanford University met together over the next nine months, developing a proposal for a training program designed to improve the educational leadership of administrators. The result of this planning was a two-year, $300,000 grant to further develop and implement a model for administrator training within the San Jose Unified School District.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the Administrator Training Program rests on four basic elements: (a) **effective educational leadership**, (b) an educational vision based on the **academic focus of schooling**, (c) research in cognitive psychology that emphasizes **coherence and simplicity**, and (d) **the centrality of language** for literacy and communication.

Together, these four elements form the foundation for an administrator training program that focuses simultaneously on the administrator and the educational program of the schools.

Effective Educational Leadership

Research shows that effective educational leadership involves knowledge and skills in three areas:

1. The LEADERSHIP OF PEOPLE (How to get things done through others)
2. The TECHNOLOGY OF SCHOOLING (Knowledge of curriculum, instructional methodologies, and assessment practices)

3. The MANAGEMENT OF THINGS (Responsibilities for organizational and administrative matters)

The three areas are equally important. Effective administrators must exhibit competence across all three of these domains if they are to be educational leaders.

This "Triangle" (see Figure A) forms the basis for the content of ATP. Administrators are trained to be effective educational leaders who use their knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and their abilities to lead people and manage things, for one purpose--to promote and support an educational vision based on an academic focus of schooling.

The Academic Focus of Schooling

The **academic focus of schooling** stems from the widespread belief (e.g. The Nation at Risk) that the purpose of schooling is to teach children to think and communicate clearly. The academic focus of schooling supports a definition of literacy that extends beyond reading and writing to include problem solving, critical thinking, and effective communication. The literate person has the capacity to handle language as a tool for thinking and communicating, to manipulate and understand ideas, and to analyze complex issues and move toward justifiable conclusions. Schools that help students reach this level of literacy do so by developing an academic focus to the entire instructional program. Such schools equip students with the intellectual skills essential for success in today's society.

Coherence and Simplicity

The third theoretical focus, **coherence and simplicity**, suggests that providing clearly organized representations of complex issues is critical to learning and understanding for both administrators and students. Organized information is more manageable and more easily retrieved from memory. The key to organizing information is simplicity and coherence. A complex system defined by a few distinctive elements and bound together by a theme is more memorable and understandable than one composed of isolated fragments. Effective administrators use these principles to organize their own thinking. They also guide their staffs to provide an educational program that emphasizes these same two principles.

Centrality of Language

The last theoretical focus asserts that language and communication are the basic tools of literacy, both for effective administrators and for students. Effective administrators use language to lead people and to manage things, while promoting the academic focus throughout the school's curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities.

Explicitness, coherence, and structure are key features of communication, equally important in both oral and written language. Speakers/writers must provide comprehensive, clear, and coherent accounts to their audiences. Effective administrators not only use language to communicate and to manage, they also promote the competent use and teaching of language and communication skills within their schools' classrooms.

Language is a mirror of the administrator's ability to think, analyze, and communicate. Via explicit and coherent language, the administrator is able to communicate a dynamic vision of both educational leadership and schooling. Most importantly, effective use of language is reflected in the creation of a school in which students engage in thoughtful communication.

Structure of ATP

Four key features provide the foundation for the structure of the Administrator Training Program:

1. **district and university collaboration**, building on the expertise of two different but potentially compatible worlds,
2. a **steering committee** composed of participants from the district,
3. a **"vertical slice"** representing all levels of the district's hierarchy, from the superintendent to prospective administrators, and
4. **experts** from both outside and within the district, to provide information and give guidance.

Collaboration

Collaborative planning has been the key to meshing the perspectives of two often contradictory worlds--the world of the university and the world of the school district. On one hand, the university researchers emphasize reflection, long-range planning and abstract thinking. On the other hand, the school

administrators focus on immediate and practical solutions to current crises. Through cooperative planning the ongoing tension between these two perspectives has produced an optimal blending of strengths from both worlds.

The collaborative nature of the project is both challenging and rewarding, because the gap between the abstract language of theory and the immediate action of practice proves to be even larger than anticipated. The successful bridging of this gap is perhaps the most critical function performed by the Stanford research staff, requiring that every theory be grounded in and illustrated by actual district problems.

The current shape of ATP is an outgrowth of collaborative planning. Staff from the district and the university jointly plan all ATP activities. The content as well as the process of the training are shaped by the two perspectives, resulting in a unique fusion of reflection and action, theory and practice.

The Steering Committee

The steering committee, composed of selected ATP participants, ensures that collaboration between the district and the university remains vital. Furthermore, the steering committee guarantees that the training remains attuned to the evolving needs of the ATP participants. The group meets regularly to discuss plans for future workshops, to give in-depth feedback on past workshops, and to monitor the overall direction of the ATP.

Vertical Slice

A critical and unique aspect of the ATP is the inclusion of a vertical slice of the district. Each session includes participants from every level within the district, from the central office to teachers contemplating administrative careers. This vertical slice format gives participants an opportunity to see district problems from many different perspectives. Furthermore, participants find it extremely valuable to establish close working relationships across organizational lines. Finally, the vertical slice format has created the beginnings of a shared language, a common culture, and a district-wide vision, all of which help to bind administrators into an unified organization.

Use of Experts

ATP uses experts from both outside and within the district. Corporate experts as well as those with experience in public

education have met with participants to share their perspectives on organizational and instructional issues. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to act as peer leaders, becoming experts in educational leadership. Past participants become trainers for succeeding groups. Additionally, participants support each other through coaching and shadowing, activities that provide further opportunities for administrators to establish a network of working relationships, and to refine and share their specific areas of expertise. It is expected that the in-house experts will form a permanent ATP leadership cadre.

Processes of ATP

The processes of the Administrator Training Program include both group and individual activities. Participants attend monthly workshops and engage in a variety of reflective and individual study activities.

The monthly workshops are centered around topics focusing on the "technology" of education (curriculum, instruction and assessment) and leadership. These workshops include large group presentations, small group discussion, simulations, practice in using new knowledge and skills, and application to real world problems facing the participants.

Throughout the training there is a heavy reliance on participant interaction. Small collegial work groups discuss and apply theoretical content to real problems facing the district. Participants frame problems and discuss solutions in problem solving groups. Members shadow and coach one another, collaborating on defining problems and solutions, offering advice and encouragement. Participants not only meet at workshops and steering committee meetings, but also confer regularly by phone and at informal meetings.

Finally, ATP advocates the development of in-district expertise by training participants to be trainers of their peers. For example, 15 ATP participants were trained as presenters for the "Working in Groups" module, a workshop in group processes and effective meeting management.

At the individual level, reflection and individual study are important. Time for discussion, analysis and reflective writing is built into the training sessions, and participants are encouraged and expected to build time for reflection and analysis into their own work schedules. The ability to be reflective increases the precision of administrators' thinking, the accuracy of their problem analyses, the success of the solutions they choose, and their ability to communicate clearly about their objectives for the educational program.

Participants engage in individual study, becoming better informed and more knowledgeable about topics directly related to an improved educational system. They bring their questions and concerns to small groups where they work collaboratively to develop understanding of complex educational issues.

The group monthly sessions and the individual activities illustrate a key feature of the ATP--continuous and integrated training. ATP is not a series of one-shot inservice workshops that stand alone, neither connected with the needs of the participants nor linked to other training. Rather, the Administrator Training Program is a program that focuses on making a lasting impact through the provision of on-going, integrated, and coherent training.

The Content of ATP

Most programs for administrators provide training in generic leadership skills, irrespective of the situations educators face day in and day out on the job. In contrast, ATP focuses on instructional leadership skills designed to meet the specific needs of the district and the individual participants in the training. The content of the Administrator Training Program is shaped simultaneously by the realities facing the district and the perspectives of both practicing administrators and university researchers.

Problem reframing. ATP participants learn the value of making conceptual sense of problems before formulating strategies for solutions. They look at problems through the dual lenses of the organization and the individual, seeing both perspectives as important for discovering effective solutions. During ATP workshops, participants are given opportunities to apply these perspectives to analyses of specific district problems (e.g., employee morale).

Change. A central emphasis has been understanding the meaning of change at two levels: the individual and the organization. Participants learn that change not only occurs at both these levels, but also in stages. Being aware of the levels and stages is critical for dealing proactively with the change processes continually facing the district.

Vision. ATP participants are taught skills in developing an over-arching vision for their school and in gaining staff and community commitment to it. The central focus is on building a vision that promotes an academic focus for all school activities. Participants learn how an instructional leader can link goals, resources, policies and instructional strategies to the vision in order to promote higher levels of school effectiveness.

Curriculum. The focus on curriculum is an essential and unique part of the Administrator Training Program. Participants learn that coherence and simplicity are central to a good curriculum. Furthermore, coherence and simplicity in a curriculum do not happen by accident; these elements are part of a careful design. ATP participants learn how to evaluate the design of a curriculum, asking such questions as "Is there a valid rationale for the content included in the curriculum?" and "How has the content in the curriculum been organized?" They learn generic procedures that can be applied to any domain of knowledge and any aspect of the curriculum, whether that be a state framework, a scope and sequence chart, or the selection of textbooks.

Routine behaviors. In order to bring the vision of schooling to reality, ATP participants learn about the power of routine behaviors. Routine behaviors are those customary and habitual activities administrators engage in as they go about their jobs--talking to students, filling in forms, supervising the cafeteria, monitoring classroom instruction. ATP participants learn that routine behaviors can be more than just haphazard reactions to the circumstances. With the vision of schooling as an organizing guide, the behaviors of the administrator can become the means for consistently and constantly promoting quality education.

Working in groups. Shared problem-solving and decision-making are hallmarks of an effective school. In order to promote the academic focus of schooling, teachers and administrators must work together to plan, to make decisions, to evaluate and to solve problems. ATP participants learn: to work more productively among themselves and with their staffs, to communicate effectively within problem-solving groups, to facilitate the task of the group whether they are group members or leaders, and to maintain productive relationships among group members. Finally, participants understand that the effectiveness of a group is the responsibility of ALL members of the group and not just of the group leader.

Oral and written language. Language--the ability to think and communicate clearly--is a key to effective educational leadership. ATP participants develop their speaking and writing skills through a series of workshops emphasizing the principles of good communication. Participants offer their own writing to be critiqued by their peers. Their oral presentation skills are honed by using video tape feedback sessions. The central notion for both the writing and speaking workshops is that coherent, clear thinking leads to coherent, clear communication.

Outcomes

Individual outcomes

Two types of individual outcomes are important to the Administrator Training Program:

- o growth in conceptual knowledge of theory and research
- o growth in practical skills and strategies based on the conceptual knowledge.

Training for specific, identified tasks is easy; training for transfer to the unknown is more difficult. Conceptualization allows people to act independently to identify problems as they arise, to analyze situations, and to create solutions as necessary. Furthermore, a common understanding of important concepts provides the basis for a shared language that can facilitate group problem-solving and communication.

Individual outcomes for the Administrator Training Program include the following:

Conceptual Outcomes Participants will:

1. reflect consciously about their roles and responsibilities,
2. reframe problems using both organizational and individual perspectives,
3. understand the principles and stages of organizational and individual change,
4. formulate a personal vision of schooling built upon an academic focus,
5. develop frameworks and plans for monitoring and evaluating curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities.

Practical Outcomes Participants will:

1. use problem reframing to analyze school problems and develop appropriate solutions,
2. use the principles of organizational change to effect educational innovation,
3. monitor and evaluate curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities,
4. use routine administrative behaviors consistently and constantly to promote a vision of schooling,
5. use group process skills to make problem solving and decision making groups more effective,
6. be precise, concise, and logical in written and oral communication.

Organizational Outcomes: SJUSD

The Administrator Training Program recognizes that individual changes cannot support district improvement without accompanying changes in the organizational fabric. Therefore, the ATP strives to change the organization itself. The organizational outcomes for San Jose Unified School District include the following:

Vision

1. a district-wide commitment to the continuous refinement of the educational program,
2. the clarification and dissemination of the district's educational philosophy.

Administrator training

1. the formation of a permanent, comprehensive, and continuous administrative training program in the district,
2. the identification and training of district personnel who possess expertise in educational leadership,
3. the creation of a network of collegial coaching relationships among administrators.

Organizational Outcomes: Stanford University

ATP has influenced Stanford University's School of Education in two ways: organizationally, through shaping the planning of a new degree program in school administration, and conceptually, through adding to knowledge of instructional delivery of administrator training and district/higher education collaborative ventures. The staff has disseminated the conceptual information to trainers and administrators from other districts at several conferences and workshops.

Program Outcomes

ATP's experience has been used to validate a new Master's degree program for prospective principals. Slated for implementation in the fall of 1989, the program will use problem-based rather than discipline-based instruction, and active rather than passive learning, while attention will focus on the academic focus of schooling.

Knowledge Outcomes

Collaboration.

1. Collaboration establishes an affective, as well as cognitive, connection. It is much more than the presentation and receipt of information.
2. Collaboration is a long-term venture, taking several years for the development of mutual understanding,trust, and a shared language.
3. Collaboration illustrates the principles and stages of organizational change: it is a process, not an event; it develops over time; it fosters change in individuals and organizations.

Instructional delivery of administrator training.

Structure

1. Effective training is ongoing, cumulative, coherent, and interactive; it is not delivered in one-day disconnected fragments.
2. An effective delivery system includes theoretical presentations followed by on-going peer coaching of new skills on the job.
3. Participation in training by personnel from all levels of the district hierarchy (the "vertical slice") strengthens training by demonstrating different perspectives to shared problems, by encouraging the development of a common culture, and by establishing problem solving relationships across organizational lines.

Process

4. The most effective instruction combines small group discussions, very short theoretical presentations, and large group summaries.
5. Discussions should precede theoretical presentations so the theory can arise as a way of organizing the practitioner's own experiences.
6. Written reflection provides a vital opportunity for administrators to organize workshop content and apply it to a plan for handling the specific problem variants each faces at the work site.
7. Small group discussion of shared problems is important for the development of collegiality.
8. The opportunity for development of strong collegial relationships is a critical feature of administrator training.

Content

9. The most successful training topics are those that arise from actual, current, and critical district problems (e.g., staff morale, textbook selection, school closing, desegregation).
10. Administrators are willing to listen to theoretical presentations to the degree that the connection to district problems is made explicit.
11. Until management and leadership issues have been addressed, administrators are able to give little attention to refining the instructional program.

Application of the ATP Model to Other School Districts

The ATP model has been designed for district specificity. It is committed to tailoring its administrator training program to take advantage of each district's strengths. Furthermore, it focuses on dealing with each district's problems, expressing and enhancing the district's culture, meeting the needs of the district's administrators and assisting the district to achieve its chosen objectives. This degree of specificity is ATP's strength; it also makes it difficult to be precise about the form that ATP would take in another district's setting. Nevertheless, certain generic elements of theory, process and structure are critical and can be transferred. Information about these elements has been disseminated to other districts at numerous conferences and workshops.

- The triangular model of effective educational leadership (Figure A) and the academic focus of schooling fit into any educational setting.

- Coherence and simplicity should be the underpinnings of curriculum, instruction and assessment in every district.

- Continuous, integrated, and interactive training should characterize all educational staff development, as should reflection and individual study.

- Input from an institution of higher learning brings the necessary element of reflection and abstraction that tempers busy administrators' desire for practical solutions. The university also provides the base of research findings that can be used to affect practice.

- The structural elements of the vertical slice, a participant steering committee, and fostering of in-house expertise would strengthen any district's administrative staff development plan.

The elements that are less predictable are those unique to the district: its culture, its strengths, its problems, and its goals. ATP's generic theory, process, and structure can easily be blended with a district's own activities and workshop content to create an administrator training program that meets the district's particular problems and enhances its own culture, strengths and goals.

Finally, certain modules in the Administrator Training Program can be readily transferred to any district's training program with only slight modifications. The training in oral and written communication, routine behaviors, group processes and problem-reframing are particularly appropriate for this instant adaptation.

Summary

The task of the educational leader is complex. Educational leaders must use an organized conceptual framework and reflective analysis to look beyond the administrative details of the job. The Administrator Training Program helps administrators to acquire both the conceptual framework and the habit of reflection. It offers fusion of theory and practice to assist administrators in thinking clearly about the purposes that underlie their work. The ATP combines theoretical underpinnings with structures, processes, and content to present administrators with cognitive tools to use in solving specific district and school-based problems.

One ATP participant put it this way:

> "Much of the day-to-day operation of the school seemed to get in the way of what I felt I should be accomplishing as an instructional leader. Through ATP I have learned to use analysis and reflection to turn these behaviors into powerful indicators of my beliefs and values."

School administrators are in a position to make a unique contribution to the education of American youth. To do so, they require a perspective arising from training that is broader in scope than that of technical expertise, recognizes that theory should guide practice, and focuses on the academic outcomes of schooling. ATP's model presents such a perspective.